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Book review: Dying to be men. Gender and language in early Christian martyr texts

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coherent confession of faith (pp. 164–6). The usual texts are cited, Tertullian in emphatic criticism of infant baptism whilst the Hippolytan *Apostolic Tradition* makes it clear that small children were baptised with others answering on their behalf (p. 166). But nevertheless he claims (pp. 168–9) a ‘fundamental change’ in the rite of initiation from the sixth century onwards. I find such an approach tendentious when it fails to make any distinction between a change in liturgical practice and a change in theology. He assumes rather than argues a genetic mutation in the theological development rather than the working out of what had always been implied.

Fürst concludes with a very helpful, pictorially well illustrated, description of ancient baptisteries of a size that could accommodate adults, demonstrating originally a separate place for baptism apart from a small area in the church building itself when infant baptism had become the norm (pp. 168–92). He then turns to a section on the theology of baptism beginning with the *Didache* but really focusing on some New Testament passages (pp. 193–205). He then summarises various controversies with Gnostics, Cyprian against Stephen, Athanasius and Basil again Arius etc. (pp. 206–24) in which baptismal issues were raised. Despite his strong preference for adult baptism, Fürst cannot of course show any dispute between the great Church and schismatics and heretics over infant baptism: the reservations of Tertullian and Gregory were always just that – a reflective querying of established and traditional practice in baptising the children of believing parents. He concludes with a useful summary of issues and controversies regarding the penitential discipline (pp. 225–6).

This is a useful and detailed introduction, with some very good illustrations. It is a great pity that there is no English translation to benefit our more obtuse students who seem unable to face up to the responsibility of learning to work in languages other than English.

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CAMBRIDGE

ALLEN BRENT

Dying to be men. Gender and language in early Christian martyr texts. By Stephanie L. Cobb. (Gender, Theory, and Religion.) Pp. xv + 208. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. £29.50 (\$50). 978 0 231 14498 8
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Books and articles discussing martyrdom and gender in early Christianity are now common but L. Stephanie Cobb takes a distinct approach, focusing on issues of identity, influenced by the social psychologists John Turner and Henri Tajfel. Here identity is seen as contextual and relational, and shifting depending on whether one's own, or an outside group, is being addressed. This basic idea is central to the book's analysis. Cobb argues that martyr texts sought to portray Christians as possessing a masculinity superior to that of their religious rivals (the out-group), although this situation was complicated in the case of female martyrs, who needed to be portrayed as simultaneously masculine and feminine in order to be acceptable role models and community members (for the in-group). This brief work consists of three more or less

introductory and two substantive chapters, focusing on martyrological texts in detail. The introduction explains the approach and its focus on issues of identity while chapter i summarises ancient ideas of gender. Chapter ii looks at the figures of the gladiator and the athlete, important models for the martyr. This material, like the gender discussion in the previous chapter, will perhaps be overly familiar to ancient historians and my concern is that the masculinity of the gladiator was actually more problematic than it seems here. The two following chapters take us to the heart of the project, focusing on close readings of the martyr texts, looking at male and female martyrs respectively. In chapter iii Cobb argues very strongly for the central importance of masculinity in the identity of the Christian martyr, as 'not simply one among many equal aspects of Christian identity; rather, in many of the martyr texts it is the very definition of Christianity' (p. 91). This argument is significantly problematised in the case of female martyrs such as Perpetua and Blandina (chapter iv): Cobb shows how they are represented as 'simultaneously masculine and feminine'. Their masculinity, Cobb argues, was used in order to shame the out-group (pagans and Jews) but their intracommunal (in-group) identity had to be sufficiently feminine in order for them to be acceptable as role models. Ultimately a masculine identity, suitably renegotiated where necessary, was central to the claim to power made by Christian texts in the pre-Constantinian world. Cobb's succinct monograph is clearly and engagingly written and has something to offer in a burgeoning field.

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LUCY GRIG

Athenagoras. Philosopher and theologian. By David Rankin. Pp. ix + 191. Farnham–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. £55. 978 0 7546 6604 2

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Après L. W. Barnard (1972), B. Pouderon (1989) et M. Peglau (1999), David Rankin publie une nouvelle monographie sur l'apologiste Athénagore. De facture très classique, elle s'intéresse successivement au personnage d'Athénagore (ch. i), à la question du corpus athénagorien (ch. ii: un ou deux ouvrages?), au dialogue ('conversation') qu'établit l'apologiste avec les doctrines théologiques et philosophiques de son temps (ch. iii), à son épistémologie (ch. iv), à sa théologie en relation avec la question des premiers principes (ch. v), à des questions dites secondaires ou dérivées ('subordinate topics') aussi importantes que la question trinitaire et la morale (ch. vi), enfin aux différentes influences exercées sur la pensée d'Athénagore. Sur les questions encore fort débattues liées à l'authenticité du traité *Sur la résurrection* et à ses adversaires, ou encore à la notice de Philippe de Sidè, Rankin donne un avis, longuement légitimé, qui est en fait très proche du nôtre: à défaut d'arguments contraires d'un poids suffisant (les preuves ou indices apportés par les uns et les autres semblant s'équilibrer), il lui paraît préférable de s'en tenir à la tradition et d'attribuer la paternité du *De resurrectione* à l'apologiste; plus certain lui paraît l'identification de ses adversaires, en lesquels Rankin voit sans conteste des gnostiques ou des marcionites hostiles à une conception purement charnelle de la résurrection. Quant au témoignage de Philippe de Sidè, s'il le rejette dans son ensemble, puisqu'il contient trop d'erreurs ou d'invéraisemblances, il n'en considère